

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
CENTER FOR LOWELL HISTORY
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

MOGAN CULTURAL CENTER
LOWELL NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS LOWELL
KHMER ORAL HISTORY PROJECT I

INFORMANT: NAREN HENG [CAMBODIA]
INTERVIEWER: MEHMED ALI
DATE: MAY 14, 2003

S = SAMMY

L = LINDA

N = NAREN

A = ALI

Tape 03.10
Side A

S: Hello Linda, how are you doing today?

L: Good, how are you Sammy? (S: Good) What time is it?

S: Right now it's 4:10.

A: Okay, you're all set.

L: Okay.

A: That's fine. Just let it run now, and you can start. You can start the interview now.

S: Hello.

N: Hi.

L: Your name is Naren Heng.

N: Naren Heng, yup.

L: So it's N A R E N, first name. Last name, H E N G? (N: Yes) Okay, when and where were you born?

[Lots of voices in background-noisy]

N: I born in Cambodia.

L: Which part?

N: In, it's not a capitol city, but it's in a Province that we call like Battambang.

S: That's where my parents are from.

N: Yah. I was born in 1956.

S: 1956?

N: Umhm.

L: Did you live in that part of Cambodia your whole life?

N: No. I just lived in that part like two years. When I was two years old my parents moved to Phnom Penh, that's the capitol city.

L: Did you grow up in Phnom Penh then?

N: Yah.

S: Do you know the reason why you guys moved to Phnom Penh?

N: Because of my father's job.

L: Oh, what did he do for a living?

N: He's in military.

L: The military?

N: Yah, he's like accounting [unclear]. Accounting.

L: Accounting?

N: Yah.

S: Did you go to school when you were young?

N: I went to school, yah. I finished high school.

S: You finished high school? (N: Yah) Wow, that's pretty good.

A: And what school did you attend Naren? In Phnom Penh?

N: No, it's not right in Phnom Penh, but it's like, it's a little further you know, like they have, what's the name? [School name unclear], that school, [school name unclear]. [School name unclear] University. University. Yah, because in France they call university you know, like.

A: That's the equivalent of a high school, right? In French it's Universite? Is that a high school or a college?

N: Oh, because like over there they have like high school and college, like a little bit like college together, you know, they call university.

A: Okay.

L: Did you walk to school?

N: No, I ride bike, like a motorcycle.

S: Was it a long distance [unclear].

N: No, like fifteen minutes.

S: Not too bad. Good exercise.

L: What are your parents' names? Did they work in the military?

N: [Yung Bon Heng], my father, and my mom, [Unclear].

L: And what are your grandparents' names?

N: What side? The mother side?

L: Both of them.

N: Okay. I forgot my father's side. I haven't meant them though, because they dead for a long time. And my grandmother's side, [name unclear] is my grandmother, and my grandfather is [name unclear], yah, because they have the same last name. They like cousin, something like that.

L: Oh, did you live with them, because usually the parents live with the grandparents right?

N: Oh no. They just went to visit us in Phnom Penh once in a while.

L: Where did they live? Did they stay in Battambang?

N: Yah, yah, they stay in [name unclear Camp] in Battambang.

A: And so you don't remember the names of your father's parents?

N: [Unclear] something like, his mother name [unclear], but I don't know her last name. They died a long time ago.

A: Yah.

L: Did you grow up in a big family? How many people were in your family?

N: Seven brothers and sisters.

L: Wow! Were you the youngest, or?

N: No, I'm the oldest.

L: How many sisters did you have?

N: I got five sisters, including me, and two brothers.

L: Did your sisters go to school too?

N: Yah.

L: What did you do for fun when you were younger? You had a lot of brothers and sisters to play with. What did you play with them?

N: Yah, play with them. Usually like we don't do anything much though. Like we like to go shopping. And like we went to Phnom Penh you know, because like my house is a little further like. It's not right in the middle of like Phnom Penh, you know. Like off. And we went to Phnom Penh and doing some shopping, or go see movie, you know, something like that with my sisters.

L: Was there a lot of fun stuff to do around there?

N: There's a lot of fun, yah, stuff to do. We, like they have like swimming, but it's not like in the pool like here and like you know, like in a lake. You know, we go in a lake, something like that.

S: What was your first employment?

N: When?

L: Did you work when you were in [in Battambang]?

N: No, when I, you know I, okay, when I was eighteen years old I got married. I didn't work. My husband, my first husband, he's engineering agriculture in French, what they call in English, I didn't (--)

L: Agriculture?

N: Like they do like farm things, like [unclear].

L: Agricultural stuff?

N: Yah. I, I didn't work. I'm the housewife. I was a housewife. And then after that I got my baby, my daughter.

L: At what age did you get married?

N: She born in '75, my daughter.

L: How old were you then?

N: I was nineteen.

S: So a year after your marriage.

N: Yah, yah. And then we went through Pohl Pot, you know. That's how my daughter's father died you know, in that Pohl Pot Regime.

L: How did you meet your husband? Was it an arranged marriage?

N: It's an arranged marriage, but we liked each other. So like we, they didn't let us go out at all, you know, but we snuck out. [All chuckle]

L: Like I skip the movies.

N: Yah, I went to see movie. Yah, and went to the park couple of times, you know, but we didn't tell anybody, because you're not suppose to do that. There's no go out over there.

A: Was it strict?

N: Very strict. If the parent know, if my father know, he would like whip us with the you know, whatever.

L: You weren't in the capitol city, so do you remember what happened when Pohl Pot took over [unclear]?

N: Oh Pohl Pot. No, what you mean, like the day that Pohl Pot came to the city?

L: Yes.

N: Yah, we just heard, okay, we just heard a, like the news in the radio in the morning, like say, like you know, Pohl Pot came, something like that, and then we prepare. Don't leave the house at all. They just say that, and then the radio cut off like one hour later, like around 9:00. And we just heard the gun, you know, like the noise, like shooting, you know. And we just stay in the house until around 12:00. We see Pohl Pot came and it was just like, told us to leave the house. That's all. That we didn't, we didn't go out at all, because we afraid that you got killed that day, that day that Pohl Pot came in. I was right in the city that day, because like we move right in the city, in the capitol city, in Phnom Penh, because like a lot of like firing in the borders Phnom Penh. That's why they moved.

S: So did you leave that day?

N: We left that day, yah, but we got, got a lot of stuff, because my father have a car and we put everything, like rice, like some food, some clothes in the car, and then we left that day.

L: Where did you go after that?

N: We had to go like in, they call like [Takeo?], [unclear Takeo?]. It's much further. Like it took us like a month to get there, because you cannot drive. You have a car, but you cannot drive. You have to just push the car and walk along with a lot of people on the road. You know?

L: Oh. So there were a bunch of you guys going?

N: Yah, yah. They don't let you drive either, just walk.

A: Did you guys try to start the car up and drive, and they told you to stop, or?

N: No, they didn't tell us to stop either, because we cannot drive anyway, because there's a lot of people walk.

S: Oh, there's a lot of people walking.

N: Yah.

L: Did you have family in Takeo?

N: No. No, we just, we just go. We didn't have any family.

L: How come you guys went there?

S: Is that the place where everybody was going to?

N: Yah, we just follow each other, and then we talk on the road, like where we going. And then they said, oh maybe go to Takeo. Like there's more food over there, you know. We know like we not going to have a lot of food to eat. Like we looking for the place, better place to go. That's why.

L: Where exactly is Takeo? (N: [Unclear] Takeo) Is that like towards the west, or near Thailand

N: No, no. Near Thailand is Battambang. Battambang is near Thailand, and Siem Reap. But Takeo, I don't know. West, or north, I forgot already.

S: You said your husband died earlier because of the Pohl Pot time. Was it during this whole moving scene?

N: No, no. Until almost, you know, he died, he didn't die until like 1978. '79 we got out from Pohl Pot. We got out from Pohl Pot, but he just died like '78, a couple of months before like we got out of Pohl Pot, because he drowned.

S: Oh, so it wasn't related to (--)

N: He drowned because they forced him to carry the bamboo across the river with the water like a big flood at that time, you know. Yah, that's why he drowned.

A: So who did you go, when you left Phnom Penh, who were you with? Was your mother with you, and sisters, brothers?

N: Yah, everybody together. My father, my mother, all sister and brother, but and then like, like years later in Takeo, in Takeo like they announced like who have relative in Battambang? Battambang parents, like you can go, but it's not true. They just, there's not enough people over there to do some farm thing, you know. That's why they just want people to go. That's why we say, "Yes, we want to go to Battambang, because we have a lot of relative in Battambang. You know? That's why like, yah, they give us a ride, people who want to go to Battambang. Like a couple of days we get to Battambang, but we ended up, didn't go to Battambang, we end up in Pursat City, live there in the jungle. And my father died over there.

A: So what year did they move you guys from Takeo to Pursat.

N: Like '76. Pursat, yah, '76.

A: And they lied to you to tell you to go to Battambang?

N: Yah, they lied to us, but it's not really Battambang. They just drop us like wherever they you know, they need people, you know.

L: So what did the (--) When they (--) They dropped you off at the jungle?

N: They dropped, they call like in the small village they call [unclear] in Pursat City and further in the like mountain, you know, in the mountain.

A: And how long did you guys stay there?

N: We stayed there until like 1979, until we you know, we got out from those [Khmer Rouge].

L: And how many people were in your family at that time? You had your daughter?

N: Yah, I still have my daughter, but my husband die. And a lot of like, then my brother-in-law died too, my father died, and my, one of my sister died.

L: Was it all due to different causes?

N: Yah. It didn't like, they didn't (--) One of my brother that, in-law, they kill him. (S: Wow) Yah, because they took his property, and he refused to give it to them. And then that's why they just point the gun behind him, like let's go. If you want to follow your property, go. And then he, he followed them. He not that smart. I don't know why he did that, but he did what he did, and then he's gone.

A: Did you guys ever see him?

N: Well they, we didn't saw him. We like everybody, it's there time. Everybody like they have their own work, you know. We went to work. Like if we didn't go to work. And like he happened to be sick and stay home. And then that happened. And so we didn't know.

L: How did you find out about him though?

N: People told us, like neighbors.

A: And what happened to your father?

N: My father, he just got sick. He just like, they send him to, to do some work far away from the village, and then he got sick. He couldn't eat, he got stomach problems, you know, and they just took him to the hospital. And then later we heard like he died. We didn't see him too, because he moved far away from village, and we didn't know. At that time if people got sick, the father got sick, you go to visit, they just going to yell at you,

like kick you out. You have to do your work, you know, you cannot visit. That's their job to do it, you know, take care of like hospital things. You can't go with the [unclear].

L: What kind of work did you do there?

N: I do the farm thing, you know, plant rice, the woman thing, plant rice.

L: All the women planted the rice?

N: Yah.

L: What did the men do?

N: The men, like they plow something like that. They do the plowing, and they do a lot of like, you know, something harder. Like they cut the trees, something like that, you know.

S: Was it long hours?

N: It starts from 6:00 (S: In the morning?) yah, start from 6:00 until 6:00. They give us one hour lunch. And at night start. When you come home, 8:00, another, like you have to go back to work at 8:00 at night. (S: Why?) 8:00. They have night work too.

L: What did you do at night?

N: At night we didn't plant rice, but we have like, they make some (--) I don't know, like I don't know how to call it. Like [word unclear]. Like you know.

L: Oh, vegetables in the water?

N: Yah, like (--)

A: Canals?

N: Yah, canals, yah. They do something there.

A: How's my Cambodian? Pretty good huh. You guys are [unclear].

N: Yah, they made some of that, you know, like they, so they can plant a lot of like rice, something like that.

A: So did you have to dig the canals and the irrigation?

N: Dig canals, yah. At night, we do that at night.

L: In the dark?

N: They have like the light, but yah, not candle, like [unclear]. Like, what, what they call it?

A: Torch?

N: Yah, yah, the torch. Like they using that.

L: What did they give you to eat during lunch?

N: They had like small portion of rice like this. They measure with a small bowl, you know, small bowl, and then a little like, the vegetable. Like they just boil vegetable with salt. That's all. One small bowl of like the vegetable soup, and the small bowl of rice.

L: When did you eat dinner. When you go home at 6:00 to eat?

N: Yah, when we go home, but we go to work far away from their house. They get dinner at work. They have like a cook do it there, at work.

L: Is it the same thing for dinner?

N: That same thing, yah, the same thing. Sometime they have no vegetable, they just give us salt, you know, that's all. That's why a lot of people died, not enough to eat.

A: When you went back to work at eight, what time did you work till at night?

N: Till ten o'clock, two hour at night.

A: And obviously before Khmer Rouge came there was plenty of food to eat, right?

N: Yah, yah, a lot of food.

A: So where did all of that food go?

N: They just didn't let us eat. We don't know.

A: I mean you were, you were planting a lot of rice. Where was that rice going?

N: They collected the rice. They want to control that. We don't know that. We just do the work. I think they sent it to outside the country, trade with something maybe they do that, or they just don't want us to eat. Yah, we really don't know.

A: Any interesting stories during that time?

N: Just interesting, I like it. I mean I (--)

A: No, it doesn't have to be likeable stories. It can be bad stories too.

N: Yah, I, the bad time for me is like when my husband die, you know, I was young too. And he didn't live with me. He got to live like far away. We love each other so much you know, and then he, he just come home like once every two months. Every time he come home like that, everybody like, don't, don't let, like ask the leader, like don't let Naren like go to work the night work. You know, day work, you have to go, but night work like, because she got to spend time with her husband. Something like that. Everybody know, like know we love each other so much. And that night that he got killed I didn't even know. I just was waiting for him. I know like he's coming, because one of his friends came already. He know my husband die, however he didn't tell me. He don't want me to know like he died already. I was just waiting, and then I keep asking him, "Why is my husband not coming?" And he said he don't know. He got to ask the leader, you know, something like that. And I went to ask them, and then he just like, his wife just die like one month ahead, before my husband died, but he understand that. Like how upset, and how you know, I am. That's why, after that like, when I know he died like, I didn't go to work, I didn't do nothing for like two months. Usually if you don't go to work for three days they send you to hospital, right, and you not really sick for one week they send you back to work. And, but I stayed home for two months because I didn't care. Like if you want to kill me, I told my leader, "If you want to kill me, go ahead and kill me. I can't do the work. I can't go to work." That's why I was really upset. He just let me stay home for two months. Nobody can do that. I was like, "Oh my." Just lucky, I was just lucky. After we left like, 1979, like when we left the leader, the Pohl Pot and me, like we met each other in Phnom Penh City, like you know, we still nice to each other, because he was nice to me at that time, you know. I was nice to him. I just was lucky. I've been thinking about it now, if it wasn't him, it's like I got killed already, you know, because I didn't do nothing for two months.

L: So what happened after two months? You went back to work?

N: Yah, I went back to work. Everyday that I didn't work, I just went to the river where my husband got killed, just sit over there everyday. Later, after two month, you feel like relieved a little bit, you know, you go back to like a little bit normal. I go back to work.

L: How old was your daughter at the time?

N: She was like three years old and like her father died.

L: Who watched her while you were off at work?

N: They have the babysitter.

L: Was it somebody you knew, or somebody from the government?

N: Yah, they, they have the government, like the leader you know, like have the babysitter for, for us who have small babies.

L: Was it one person watching all the babies, or?

N: One person like watch like ten babies.

A: What was the name of the river where you used to go everyday?

N: No they, not they just it river. This is the name of the place. The name of that village [unclear]. It's just called [unclear] river.

A: Okay. Now with your family, did they break up the children during this period, or you all stayed together?

N: If the children is like six years old, they break up the children. They have to go like the children place. They can't live with the parents.

A: So did they take your brothers and sisters away?

N: Oh yah, they all go away.

A: All of them.

N: Yah, all of them. They don't, they don't live together. Only like people who marry that they stay in the village, and the single, they go to the single place, you know, like they have place for them.

A: What happened to you brothers and sisters? Where did they get sent to?

N: They sent to my, one of my brother like far away from the village. Yah, but another three, two sister, and another two sister and one brother, they stayed together in that group, that's a single group, teenagers.

A: And one of your sisters passed away you said?

N: Yah, one of my sisters died because she got sick, she got fever, you know, and then they claim like you know, she pretend you know, because she's lazy, she don't want to go to work. And they just made her to go to work. And then one she was like really hot, very hot, and then they have to take her to the hospital. It was a couple of days later she died.

L: How long did you stay there at that camp?

N: At the Khmer Rouge? Yah, from 1975 to 79.

L: 1979? And when did you come here?

N: To the United States? 1978.

L: '78?

N: Oh! '88!

A: '88, okay.

N: '88. '88. [All giggle]

A: I'm just going to come for a quick visit and I'm going to go back to, back to Cambodia.

N: '88, yah.

A: So what do you remember about the time when Vietnam invaded?

N: Vietnam invaded? Because like we happened to live in the city. We just heard like Vietnam invaded again. Oh when? Oh you mean like after the Khmer Rouge. Oh, I thought like before Khmer Rouge, before.

A: No.

N: After. When Vietnam you know, yah, Vietnam live with us you know, like people and Vietnam. We don't really know, we don't like Vietnam at all. We didn't like. We liked them anyway, because like they kind of nice to us, to the people, you know, at that time when I lived there. They nice to us like them. They get me a job. They help me like when I didn't have like them. I don't know, but just not happened to everybody. They helped me. They give me like some goal to start the living, to start open like small business. I just have like small grocery store. Not store, just a small place you put like groceries, and you know, in a market. I didn't hate them, no.

A: But Narin, when Pohl Pot controlled, and then Vietnamese, they got rid of Pohl Pot, (N: Oh yah) where were you at that time? What happened, and what do you remember?

N: Oh at that time you know, we just like in one day we were going to leave to work, but then we heard the gun come very close. And then we saw the helicopter you know, like and then the leaders just say like, "Everybody stay put. Don't go anywhere." And okay, "Everybody get ready!" The leader is just like, "Everybody got ready. If I say you leave, you have to leave." He didn't let us know before, like we going to go somewhere, you know, they're going to take us to the mountains, something like that. And until that day that we heard the gun like very close, I said, "Oh, they're coming." And that's why like that day they lead us to the jungle, but I'm kind of like staying back, because they kind of rush, because they try to run away from Vietnam soldier. They kind of rush. Just go like fast. I just like kind of stayed back, because I don't want to go with them. A lot of people don't want to go with them, but some people had to go with them, because they

push from behind, you know, like "Go, go, go, go!" Some people went up to the mountain got killed, you know, in the mountain, no water, no (--) Like a lot, but a lot of people stayed, just stayed back. And when they left we just stayed, you know, with Vietnam soldier.

A: Do you remember when the Vietnamese came into the village?

N: Yah, yah, we remember that. And then, yah, when they came they just like, they talk to people that we don't understand them. We talk yah, they talk to people like, "Stay, stay, stay." They didn't do anything to people that we know. We know already they're not going to kill people. We just stayed with them. Went and talked to them. They're nice to us. Like I said, they're very nice to us, you know, we stayed with them.

L: You stayed with them until 1988?

N: No, I stayed. People just stayed with them. Like they protect us, you know. A couple of months I stayed in that place, a couple of months.

L: Where did you go after that?

N: After that I left that place, because I, that day I separated from my daughter, because that day that I heard, like we heard guns and then they just push us, "Move, move, move!" I just happened to leave my daughter on the [unclear] with one of my friends. Like we going live together. But, and then like when they gun come behind us, like he just ran, he just ran. "Come, come after." And then we, a lot of people on the street, we couldn't find each other. That's why I have to wait over there a couple of months. Just people walk back, down from the mountain, go back, go back to the city, you know. I just wait to see them. They come down from the mountain, you know, like on the way to the city. They come back, because up there a lot of people got killed. No water, no food, no nothing. And down here in the village like, Vietnamese just give us rice, you know, like something like that, Vietnamese soldier. I wait a couple of months because of my daughter. I wait, I wait for her, but she didn't [unclear] either like them. That guy came down from the mountain. I just saw him on the street. I just sit on the street everyday for three months until I, you know, see her. And then I just grab her. A lot of kids died, but he just very nice. He took care of my daughter very good. In the mountains, like no water, something like that, and my daughter only three years old. When go to the bathroom, something g like that, he take care of everything. He's very nice.

A: What was his name?

N: I, I forgot his name already. And then he just left with his wife, and the family, his mother and father, and I just took my daughter. I just say thank you, and then they just go forward, you know.

A: You never saw them again?

N: Never saw him again.

L: It's like a movie. So where did you go after that?

N: Then I went to Phnom Penh city.

L: You went back to Phnom Penh?

N: Yah, I went back to Phnom Penh, I lived there with my aunt. I found my aunt. And our house like got burned already, and she still have her house, and they call [unclear]. It's an airport, near airport, that we lived before. But her house, still have the house, and our house all got burned. And we lived with her for a while. And then I, I didn't do nothing. I just like stay with her, and then I went back. I went back to live in Battambang City with my grandparents.

[Tape turned off, then on again]

A: And when you lived with your aunt, was your mother and your brothers and sisters all reunited?

N: Yah, yah, we all lived together. And then one of my sister, she's looking for a job. She's a nurse, you know, doing some nurse over there. And then I didn't do anything. I just like bring some stuff to sell. Like I go to Battambang, I come back to Phnom Penh City. I just doing that once in a while. And I just sell like candy, I sell rice, candy, a little cookies, something like that at home, you know, right in front of my house, like my aunt's house. I do that. Yah, I make a living doing that. (A: Really) Yah, just cigarette, little stuff, you know, make a living doing that. But I went to, like to buy that stuff like from Battambang, something like that. We have to ask soldier, car, you know. The soldier car, like from step to step we just go like because no, no transportation that time. We just like, we go with the soldier, like Vietnamese soldier. Crazy doing that, but I was young too, and like young women just go with the soldier, pile like that.

L: How long did it take to go to Phnom Penh to Battambang?

N: Like one day.

L: One day?

N: Crazy thing to do. But a lot, no, a lot of people go. Like we, we don't go alone. Like ten women, or like two men, something like that. And we go together and buy stuff, because Battambang they bought a lot of stuff from Thailand, you know, that's why. We had to go buy over there cheaper, and then, then we can sell like for months. And then when it's all gone we go again. Like my brother didn't want to go, because the guy, it's hard to ask for a ride. You know, women, easy to get a ride. Yah. [All chuckle] But that's a crazy thing today.

A: Did the soldiers flirt with you?

N: Yah!

L: Did you understand them? [Unclear].

N: Oh yah, we learn a lot, like Vietnamese language, but now I forgot it all, because I never use for a long time.

L: Did your daughter go to school while you were going?

N: Not until like, and then I moved back to live with my grandparents in Battambang City, [unclear] near the border of Thailand. That's when my daughter start to go to school, when she was like six years old. Yah.

L: Yah, six, or seven. Why did you decide to come to the United States in 1988?

N: We kind of late, because we didn't have a lot of money. We wanted to come early, because we heard, we heard a lot of people you know, leave the country and go to Thailand Camp, like refugee camp in Thailand. We heard all about that. Then I sent my brother like to check it out about that. And he told us about it. We want to leave, but we couldn't leave early. We didn't have a lot of money. The little it cost like [speaks in khmer], I don't know how many ounce you know, in gold. One [unclear] in Cambodia. Cambodian people they call [unclear]. I think it's one ounce, something like that. They call like three [unclear]. For one person, they generally leave us from [unclear] in Battambang, to, to the camp, to a refugee camp in Thailand, Khao-I-Dang Camp.

L: You didn't go to a refugee camp?

N: Yah we went, but we kind of late. See we went until like, we left home until '85, you know, because we didn't have a lot of money.

L: How many of you went?

N: I bring like you know, two brother, and my sister, and me.

L: Did your daughter go with you?

N: Yah, my daughter too. My daughter. And that's why I still have two sister and one brother in, in Cambodia, but one of my brother went back. He couldn't stay in camp that long [in Thailand]. Can't wait that long. He went back to Cambodia.

A: Tell us about your journey to get to the camp?

N: From, no, it's (--) From [unclear], that's the name of the city, the name of the city that I lived in Battambang, right, that night we left at night around 11:00. Then we have to walk. It was a flood, like the water like up here.

A: Up to your chest?

N: Yah, up to my chest. And we walked quietly, and one of the guy have to hold my daughter. We walked quiet, like fifteen people left at night.

A: Fifty, or fifteen?

N: Fifteen. Yah, fifteen people including the leader, two leader, the guy. And yah, we walked until like far away, until like I think like one mile, one and a half mile, something like that. And then they got the small boat, [unclear], small boat, then we go on the boat, because we have to walk quietly at night. Nobody know we walking. Yah, and then we go on the boat until like, until morning. Until morning we got to a little, like camp, another camp, not the refugee camp yet. Another camp, it's far away from the refugee camp. Then we got there, we walked another, on other day, another one day. Then we got to the camp, and we going to stay there. They call like, what's the name of that camp? I forgot already.

A: Not Khao-I-Dang?

N: Not Khao-I-Dang. It's not Khao-I-Dang yet. Khao-I-Dang is in Thailand. This was in the border, still in the border. Still, but they call like Khmer [unclear] Camp, something like that, like soldier, father, you know, father soldier, but they're all Cambodian soldiers, Cambodian soldier camp. And people live there. And then we stayed there for like four, five months. So we wait to get to go Khao-I-Dang, but we wait to have some more money to hire the leader to lead us from that camp to Khao-I-Dang Camp. That's a lot of money too.

L: How do you get the money?

N: And then, you know the friend, you know my friend in, she lives in Philadelphia now. She left before us, three years before us. Yah, we know her address, something like that, and they send us money. But we got to stay, we stayed in that camp for five months. And then we make some money with, we sell some you know, [Very noisy. Interview quiets down children in background] we sell, yah, we make a living over there for four or five months. So we saved some money. And then that's how we go to Khao-I-Dang Camp. Now we walk one day. We left like at night, like 4:00 in the morning, and then we got there like (--) Only one day, we walk one day. The leader lead us to Khao-I-Dang. They come, they (--) It cost like \$5,000 [unclear] is like two hundred an fifty dollars in American dollars for each person, to lead us from that camp to Khao-I-Dang Camp.

L: How long did it take the whole journey from your camp to Khao-I-Dang?

N: Like from, from the city that, city that I lived, to the camp, to like [farther] camps, Cambodian Camps, like two days. We walked for two days. And then from that camp to Khao-I-Dang Camp, only one day. One day, but we, we left like 4:00 in the morning and we got there at night around 8:00.

L: And that was in 1985?

N: In 1985?

L: So you stayed there for three years?

N: Three years, yah.

L: Can you tell us about the journey coming over here from Khao-I-Dang?

N: No, we got (--) Yah, sometime [unclear] I was single at that time, and then I got married to my husband.

Side I ends

Side II begins

A: I have to head out, so I'll talk to you guys later. Okay? They do a good job, huh?

N: Yes.

A: Okay. Thanks a lot.

N: Okay, thank you. Bye. I got married to him, but I got my sister and one of my brother with me. The in-law, when we go for interview to come to United States, the in-law they don't take us, because the uncle, my husband sponsored him. And he can take me because I'm his wife, but they don't take the in-law. United States don't take the in-law. That's why, that's why one of my sister now in France, in Paris, and another one of my brother in Holland now. After I left Khao-I-Dang Camp to come to United States, and then we heard, we heard Khao-I-Dang Camp is going to close very soon. That's why one of my sister just goes to Paris. She go interview with, like with France, and one of my brother go to Holland.

L: What was your life like during, while you were living in Khao-I-Dang?

N: I live in Khao-I-Dang, and that's why I got married to my ex-husband. I didn't love him, but he's very nice, and he, he was English teacher. And yah, he teach English, make a living. He make good living. And then later he quit that job, we opened business like restaurant. We sell like noodle soups, something like that, [unclear], in Khao-I-Dang Camp. We sell that and make good living over there. So we, we don't have anybody send money to us. But once in a while they say like Thai soldiers come, they don't let

you have open market in that camp, you know. They just like throw things away. Like when we, when we see him come around we just close the window, the restaurant. Just small house like this, but he make it restaurant.

L: They never went in to check?

N: They, they just ride. They just ride on the street. They don't know, because we close the window already. Nobody tell them like oh, there's a restaurant somewhere, no. And in the small market outside on the street, like they sell vegetables, something like that, they just run away. And then they left the vegetables, or meat on the street, and the soldier just collect them all, just like that. But they, they don't care. Actually you know, they run away from one, you know, they don't get in trouble. Or they send them to another camp, you know? If they got them they send them to another camp like far away. Yah.

L: [Comment unclear].

N: Yah. And we you know, that's how (--) We happy in Khao-I-Dang, because we have like, we eat good. We have food, and good food to eat. You know, we open restaurant, we make some money.

L: And you had a son with him?

N: I had my son.

L: And what year was he born?

N: He was born in '80 (--) He was born in, ah, '85.

L: '85? Oh, he's our age.

N: Like the end of '85. Oh he has the same age you guys?

L: Yes. What's his name?

N: [Unclear]. He go to high school. He graduate this year.

L: We know him.

S: Yah, we know him.

N: Hey you guys speak Cambodian good! My son, he don't speak Cambodian that well.

L: [Unclear]

N: Why? Because I only have, you know, because like I have one daughter and one son, but and then my daughter, yah, I don't know why, they don't speak Cambodian at home. They just speak English at home.

L: Your husband, your second husband, part English, did he teach you the English? Is that why you're so good?

N: Yah, he taught me English, but no, I didn't study English a lot, because I like [doing housewife] over there, and I was doing something else. Like cleaning, cooking. So I didn't study a lot either in the camp. And then later then we opened the restaurant, forgot it. We never studied.

L: [Unclear]. How did you meet your husband, your second husband?

N: Because he's my English teacher. Yah, I went to school with him. That's how I met him.

L: Okay. Did you come straight to the United States, or stop in any other place?

N: I stop in Philippines.

L: Yah, that's where [unclear]. And how long did you stay in the Philippines?

N: Like six months.

L: Six months?

N: Yah.

S: And what were you doing there?

N: We just study English, you know, just that. Go to school, study English.

L: So they gave you a place to live, things like that?

N: Yah, they, they provide us food you know, like meat, fish, rice, and then we don't have to do anything, we just go to school.

L: [Unclear]. And when you came here did you come straight to Lowell?

N: No, I, first I came, I lived in Washington State.

L: Washington? Wow, that's far. How long did you live in Washington?

N: One year.

L: One year?

N: '89 I came here.

L: You came to Lowell after Washington?

N: Yah.

L: And what did you do for work when you were here in the United States? In Washington, did you work?

N: Oh yah, in Washington I worked. I worked in a farm. I work in a farm, but it was too hard, too hard work. Then I heard like, I heard one of my friends, they live here. They're married. Live here, they told me that yah, here there's a lot of factory. You can work inside, you know, because we can't just get a better job, because we didn't speak English, you know. That's why I move over here, looking for a job. Yah, and then I got, when I came here I got a job in plastic factory. It's hard work too. [Laughs] And that's inside. And then I went to school. I went to school in the morning. I went to English Second Language in Lowell High School, and I work at night. In the morning I go to school. Right now they, yah, school is here now, but before (-)

L: The Smith Baker Center?

N: Yah. Yah, no, next door.

L: Oh, oh!

N: Yah, next door. And before, in high school, in Lowell High School.

L: Yah, ESL?

N: Yah, ESL. And then when I, I went to school over there like a year and a half, three semesters, or something like that, yah. And then I went to Middlesex Community College.

L: And what did you study?

N: And then I studied just like reading, writing and math. Just three course, you know, because I want to know English.

L: But was life hard when you first came to the United States? Was it really difficult?

N: But life was hard, but we didn't have money, but we didn't worry that much, because we think like here we can work, we can make money. Yah, but it was hard. See, I told you, I work at night and go to school days. You know, and I have baby. And then I got divorced, like one year later we got divorced.

L: One year after you moved to Lowell?

N: Yah, after I moved to Lowell we got divorced. And then, because my husband, he gamble too much. I work hard. See I, I went to school in the morning, work at night, and cook and clean, and baby sit. See, I have small kids at that time. He was like four years old you know, and (--)

L: So now you're a single mom working, and (--)

N: Single mom working and raise two kids.

L: And going to school.

N: When I went to Middlesex like two years, four semester, then I just study English and math. I start from like, math I started from like Algebra I, go up to Algebra II. And English I, yah, I just study English, and then I quit because I didn't, I had to find something faster, you know, I can work right away. I cannot just stay in school like that. That's why I went to hairdressing school here in Lowell, downtown Lowell.

L: Oh Blaine's?

N: No, the other one. Lowell, the one across the street.

L: Oh. Lowell School of Hair Design, or something?

N: Um.

L: Somewhere downtown.

N: Yah. Yah, that one across. The only two in downtown like the other one. And then I got, after I finished I was looking for a job. I got a job at Super Cut in Westford. I finished in 1993. I finished hairdressing school. Got license, and then worked for Super Cut for two years. '96 I opened this. '96 I opened my shop right here. I just bought it from an old guy. He, he told me he retired. He just want to move to Florida. That's why I just bought the shop. And then I was here since then, '96 until now. Seven years.

L: Have you been to Cambodia since you've been here?

N: I went to France one time to visit my sister.

L: Do you want to go back to Cambodia to visit?

N: To visit, yes, but not to live there. To visit, I want to go back, because I still have my mother, and my sister, brother are there.

L: I you could go back in time to bring something that you left behind in Cambodia, what would it be?

N: Something I left behind, my pictures.

L: Oh!

N: Yah. Yah. And yah, my pictures are most important. I'm going to, and then I want to take, do like video tape like around the village that I lived before, you know, to show my son, my daughter.

L: Yah, memories.

N: Yah.

L: What are you most proud of? Is it opening this shop or [unclear].

N: I'm proud I'm raising two kids by myself, and I make good, not very good, good, but it's okay you know, living.

L: Very good. Do you still keep in contact with your husband, your second husband?

N: I never, I never talk with him for a long time, on the phone either. I don't know where he is right now.

L: You don't know where he is?

N: Even my son don't know where he is, because he don't pay child support, he don't want to show up.

L: So you like Lowell?

N: Yah.

L: Do you like living in Lowell?

N: Yah, yah, live in Lowell, there's a lot like Asian store, restaurant, and you know, a lot of Cambodian, a lot of like, it's convenient for me, you know. And plus I have a shop here, where can I go?

L: Where did you live when you first came to Lowell? Like around which area? Do you remember?

N: I'm sorry?

L: When you first came to Lowell where did you live?

S: Around which part of Lowell?

N: Oh okay. I lived on Merrimack Street near the hospital. Yah, and then I moved to Willie Street. But now I moved back to Merrimack, but another, another place. Right now I live on Merrimack Street, another house, near the hospital.

L: What else could we ask? Well when you first came here did anyone help you?

N: The government help us.

L: Okay. You said your friends lived here in Lowell when you were in Washington? How did you keep in contact with her? Was it through the phone?

N: Through the phone, you know, like because she's a cousin with my husband, my ex-husband.

L: So when you moved here you lived with her at that point?

N: No. We rent our own place. We have our own place. We pay the rent.

L: Do you still keep in contact with your brother in Holland? Have you visited him?

N: We call each other all the time.

L: That must be expensive.

N: No. Buy card, you know, it's cheap to call France, like to call France and Holland. Yah, expensive to call to Cambodia, but France and Holland, no. [Unclear]. Yah.

L: When did you go to France to visit your sister?

N: Oh when? In April, last April. Just this April this year, last month.

L: Oh last month. How was it? Did you like it?

N: Oh yah! Paris is nice.

L: Do you have a lot of nieces and nephews?

N: Three nieces and nephews I never met before. Last time I met my sister like fourteen, fifteen years ago, since we was in Khao-I-Dang Camp. Yah.

L: Would you consider living in France?

N: No. I live United States better. But they, they like France now, because they heard United States is hard, it cost a lot for living.

L: Yah, [unclear].

N: Everybody have to work, work, work, that's what she said. My sister say that.

L: Are there a lot of Cambodian people over there?

N: A lot of Cambodian in France. Yah.

L: Do you have anything else to add that you haven't shared with us already.

N: No.

L: In Cambodia, before.

N: No, I just like, my son now he's graduating next month, this month! Right, in May.

L: [All speak at once, unclear]

N: Oh, June 3rd. Oh, next month.

L: But next week is the last week of school.

N: You senior too, you guys?

L: Yes.

N: Ah, then he's going to leave me to go to college. I'm happy for him.

L: Where is he going for college?

N: UMass Amherst.

L: Oh wow.

S: [Unclear]

N: Yah, he study business.

L: Where is your daughter now? Does she still live with you?

N: My daughter, she got married already. She has two babies. The two babies, over there like in the picture, that's she holding, like that's her, my daughter.

L: Does she live in Lowell?

N: No, she lives in Woburn.

L: Woburn?

N: Yah, got married, she got married to an American guy.

L: Does she visit you a lot?

N: Yah! We see each other every week.

L: Well after you worked in the plastics factory, is that the only place you worked until you went to school?

N: Yah. I worked, I worked in the plastic surgery, like for three months, and then I changed job to second shift in that place, what's the name of this place. I forgot already. They make speakers. That I worked for another two years over there before I got a job like cutting hair.

L: While you were working, who were watching your kids?

N: I have my, I have my cousin, my husband's cousin live next door.

L: Oh she stayed at home?

N: No, because like her husband and her, like one work night, one work days. (L: Umhm) Yah, I leave my son with them. And some (--) When my daughter got out of school you know, she can babysit my son.

So you know a lot about, see that's good. You know my son don't know, don't know about this story of Khao-I-Dang, war, and Cambodia.

L: So you're never going to tell him about this?

N: I try and tell him, but he just listen, but then he, get out of this way I think. Go in this way and get out.

L: Goes in through one ear and out the other? [Unclear].

N: Until like you guys doing that, you know, like you realize, or you concern about that.

L: It's interesting.

N: Yah, like when I tell him he just, yah, yah, yah. That's it.

L: Were you ever worried that he would like learn about the bad stuff and feel bad about it? Because when I was younger my Dad wouldn't let me watch the "Killing Fields." He just said that there were a lot of skulls in there and you shouldn't watch it. Were you ever worried like that about your son?

N: No, no, because he, he watch a lot like movie, like "Killing Field," like even like American movie, they kill each other, they cut people's, like something like that. He watch a lot of that already. He not, he don't have nightmare like that. He's good. He's not scared of that.

Did you guys watch the movie like "[Unclear]." Like the guy that got killed already, and then like he stay alive, and then he kill people, like cut people, he might cut people and you know, like bodies. Very scary movie! I watched it, I got scared, and then he don't, he's not scared. He doesn't got that.

L: Do you go to the movies a lot now? Do you like go to Americanized places?

N: Yah, I only watch American movie. I cannot watch Asian movie, because like they have many tape. You know, like one story but many tape. I cannot.

L: You don't have time for that?

N: No.

L: That's what my parents watch all of the time. The [unclear] that are like 50 tapes.

N: If they're not working, maybe they can, but.

L: [Unclear].

N: I can't watch that. Sometimes I run the tape and I couldn't finish the tape, and I return it back.

L: So you still cook Asian food?

N: I still cook Asian food, but for myself. And for my son, he don't eat a lot of Asian food. He eat something like noodle soup, [unclear], something like that. Like stir fry once in awhile, but not a lot, not like [unclear]. Cambodian [unclear]. He don't eat that. I just eat that by myself.

L: Do you make any American food?

N: I make, like yah, I cook American food for him.

L: Oh.

N: Yah, like steak, you know, like macaroni.

L: Do you ever want to bring him back and have him suffer through, like (--) Because my parents are always yelling at me. Like oh, why don't you do this, or that, or this, or that, because in Cambodia it's so much harder. You have to get your own water to bathe and do like other stuff. (N: Yah, yah) Have you ever threatened to bring him back over there and have him do this stuff?

N: I just talk to him. I just talk to him. I just try to (--) Sometime I watch some show, like history, something like that. Yah, like history and TV channel. And then I saw a lot like they show about Cambodian people, they do hard work over there. I just try to get him to watch that, and then I talk to him. But he still, I told him like in Cambodia they have to do that, do this, do that. And he say, "Not Cambodia. Not America." He say that. He still don't know. He just know like because I told him, but you know, when people just tell you, you don't care that much, you know. It's not, you don't care.

L: Before everything, your life in Cambodia, you status was pretty wealthy, right?

N: Yah.

L: Did you live in a big house, have a couple of cars?

N: Big house, have car, have maid. My mother didn't cook, don't clean. We have three maid at home. Because in Cambodia they don't do laundry like with the machine like here. They do it by hand. And they cook, they clean, you know, everything by hand, right? Yah, like you say, get the water or something like that. Not like just turn the water on and you get water. That's why we have three maid, because they have seven kids. Three maids at home, we don't do nothing. Are your parents and siblings wealthy now there too?

N: Some of them wealthy, yah.

L: Was your husband the first one, was he rich when you married him?

N: No, he was poor, but he got high education. Like I said, like he was engineering, agriculture engineering in Cambodia. He makes a lot of money. He was, was 29 years old, I was 18 when we got married. Almost finished?

L: Almost. We got a couple of more things here. You said your father works for the government, or the military?

N: He was a soldier [unclear].

L: He was a soldier? How did the war affect him like? Did it (--)

N: No, because he didn't fight. He just do accounting.

L: Just accounting?

N: Yah, just in office. He didn't fight. (L: Did it affect him?) He's a high rank too, you know. Yah, he, he like happened to go like here and there, bring the money, something like that, but he never fight.

L: Well when you came here did you reunite with any lost friend, or people you met during Khao-I-Dang, or anything like that?

N: Yah, yah, I met a lot of friends, like, like two friends here in Lowell, and another like couple of friends in California, that we went to school, same school.

L: How did you find them?

N: Um, the one in Lowell, he's a lawyer now, [Ong Wontong]. Yah, he went to the same school, but he's older than me. He went to the same school, and I don't know how? Oh, because like this. Because I called to Cambodia, we have friend in Cambodia. I called to Cambodia, I told them like I'm here now in the United States, in Lowell, Massachusetts. And then the one in Cambodia called you know, him, the lawyer [Ong Wontong], told him like, oh, like you know, you the same place with me you know, but Naren, Naren in that place, same place too. That's why, and then he came to the city to see.

L: When did you, what year was that?

N: Oh since like '89, or '90.

L: Oh, so it wasn't too long.

N: Yah, here in Lowell. Two friends.

L: Who was the other person?

N: [Yani, [unclear]. He's a real estate right now.

? They're doing good.

N: Yah.

L: Did you meet him the same way?

N: Yah, same. They got together all the time, the two guys, the lawyer and the real estate. And then one meet us, and then they came together at that time, like that day.

L: How did you find the people in Cali (--)

N: California? The same way. Like people, people over there in Cambodia told us, told us about that. And then they gave us the phone number, and we called them.

L: So you called them, you talked to him on the phone?

N: Talked to him on the phone, and we went to visit them too.

L: [Unclear].

S: So how is California different from Lowell in your point of view?

L: Was it Long Beach?

N: In Long Beach, yah.

L: [Unclear] Cambodian people.

N: Yah, Long Beach. Yah, and one of my friends, they very rich. They have donut shop, and another one, she poor, because she blind, she couldn't work, another one.

L: Was she blind due to the whole war?

N: She never see United States at all. She blind, the she was in Khao-I-Day Camp because her husband girlfriend throw acid on her face.

? & S: Oh! Because she should have done that to the girlfriend.

N: Yah. Girlfriend get (--)

L: Was she married to him at the time?

N: She was married to him at the time, but he was cheating.

L: And the girl cheating on the husband threw the acid?

N: Yah, she through the acid on her, because she jealous.

L: I feel awful.

N: I know, she the one who was jealous. The girlfriend.

L: Did your friend divorce her, divorce him?

N: They, they got divorced. Yah, but they didn't get divorced until like they came here, until they came here. And then he keep cheating with another girl. He keep, many times,

he keep doing that many times. That's how, she blind, she didn't want to divorce him, you know, because she needs somebody, but he keep doing that, that's why.

L: Did she have any kids?

N: She have one son. She never saw her sons face.

L: Was he born after the acid?

N: Yah, after. She got pregnant at that time. She never saw his face. Her son now is 21 years old.

L: Oh, so he [unclear].

N: Right now he goes to college. He goes to college now.

L: That's pretty good. She was blind, but she can put her son through college. I like your shoes.

N: Thank you. You guys doing good. Just volunteer? Yah.

L: I guess that's pretty good.

S: Thank you for your time [unclear].

N: Oh, you're welcome.

End of Interview